

Willingness to Defend the Baltic States in Quantitative Terms¹

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Willingness to defend or fight for own country has been tracked by various sociological surveys. For the Baltic states, the earliest data goes back to the European Values Study of 1990, when all three countries formally were still part of the Soviet Union.

While methods and questions have varied across the surveys, nevertheless, they provide a generally coherent picture, as Figure 1 suggests. The positive answers of respondents, i.e., expression on willingness to defend or fight for the country (in percent), are mapped year by year (some years contain more than one source while others contain no data at all).

The data mapped in Figure 1 draw from various sources, including polls from 1990 to 2020 for the European Values Study² and the World Values Survey,³ a WIN/Gallup International Global Survey poll,⁴ multiple surveys ordered by the Ministry of Defence of Estonia (polls conducted by Turu-uuringute, Faktum uuringukeskus and Saar Poll),⁵ a survey of the Civic Empowerment Index⁶ and project “Subjective Security in a Volatile Geopolitical Context: Traits, Factors and Individual Strategies” discussed in the publication of Vileikienė and Janušauskienė,⁷ a poll by Spinter Tyrimai commented in a publication of Sutkus,⁸ polls ordered by the Ministry of Defence of Latvia (polls conducted by SKDS),⁹ a poll presented in publication of Andžāns, Sprūds and Bruģe (poll conducted by SKDS),¹⁰ a poll presented in a publication of Ainē Ramonaitė, Petronytė-Urbonavičienė, Skirkevičius and Vosylius,¹¹ a poll presented in the publication by Andžāns and Sprūds (poll conducted by Turu-uuringute, SKDS and Baltic Surveys),¹² a poll presented in the publication by Bērziņa and Zupa (poll conducted by Latvian Facts),¹³ as well as a poll from an upcoming publication of Andžāns (polls conducted by Turu-uuringute, SKDS and Baltic Surveys).¹⁴

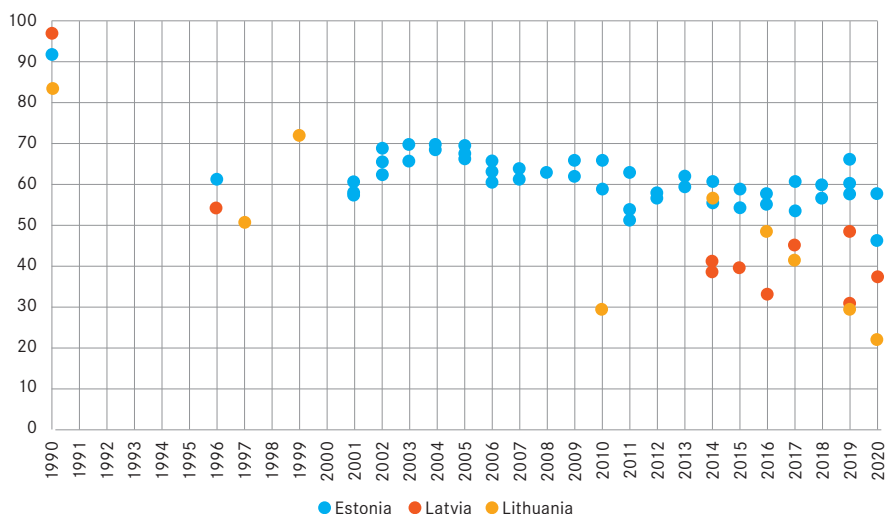


Figure 1: Willingness to defend and fight for Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania according to polls from 1990 to 2020 (percent of the respondents).

According to Figure 1, the richest pool of public data is available for Estonia, while the scarcest – for Lithuania. Situation in 1990s can be traced via the contribution of the data from European Values Study and the World Values Survey. The latest decade provides the most intense pool of data as both the polls ordered by state institutions, as well as those requested by academic studies have multiplied.

As the mapping results exemplify, since the beginning of 2000s, the highest level of willingness has been consistently recorded in Estonia, while Latvia and Lithuania have trailed. Also, data for Estonia have been more consistent, even with different sources of survey data per one year and in the following years.

Moving further, Figure 2 and Figure 3 offer a closer look on the situation in the Baltics with assistance of two nationally representative polls which were conducted simultaneously across all three states in November and December of 2019 and 2020, accordingly: 870 and 876 respondents surveyed in Estonia (face-to-face interviews combined with internet interviews), 1001 and 1003 in Latvia, and 892 and 970 respondents in Lithuania (in both countries – face-to-face interviews).¹⁵

In both polls, each respondent was asked the following question – “If [Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania] was attacked, should inhabitants of [Estonia, Latvia, or Lithuania], in your opinion, take up arms to defend themselves in all situations, even if the outcome seemed uncertain?” The available answers were “certainly yes”, “rather yes”, “rather no”, “certainly no” and “hard to answer”.

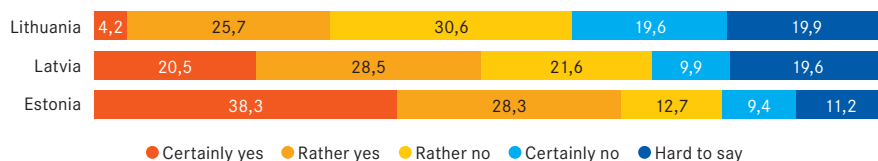


Figure 2: Willingness to defend Baltic states according to a nationally representative poll, ordered by Rīga Stradiņš University, in November/December 2019 (percent of the respondents).

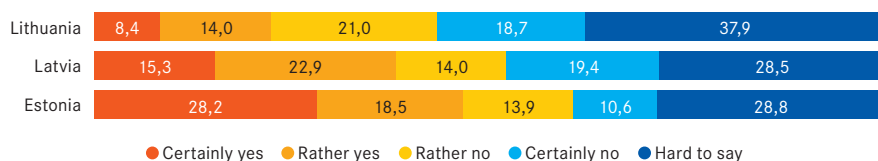


Figure 3: Willingness to defend Baltic states according to a nationally representative poll, ordered by Rīga Stradiņš University, in November/December 2020 (percent of the respondents).

According to both polls, the highest level of willingness to defend one’s own country was recorded in Estonia, while Latvia came second and Lithuania – third, on both occasions. It is important to mention that the second poll was conducted during the peak of the Covid-19 pandemic. For this or another reason, the results returned significantly higher number of hard-to-say answers.

Needless to say, results from public surveys have to be approached with care and they need a robust interpretation. The same questions can mean different things to different people. Also, people’s opinions and positions do not necessarily reflect in action. Therefore, authors of each of the following country chapters on Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania will approach these data in a broader context, providing their analytical perspective.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The chapter and the central figure of it – Figure 1 – is an updated version of a fragment of the following publication – Māris Andžāns, and Andris Sprūds, “Three-Decade Evolution of the Willingness to Defend One’s Own Country: the Case of the Baltic States,” *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 18, no. 1 (2020): 195-220.
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- ⁴ *WIN/Gallup International Global Survey Shows Three in Five Willing to Fight for Their Country*, March 18, 2015, 5.
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- ¹⁵ The first survey was first presented in these publications: Andžāns and Sprūds, “Three-Decade Evolution of the Willingness to Defend One’s Own Country: the Case of the Baltic States,” 210; Māris Andžāns, and Andris Sprūds, “Willingness to defend one’s own country and to resist in the Baltic states.” *Security and Defence Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (2020): 18.
The second survey is presented in further detail in a forthcoming publication – Māris Andžāns, “Multi-Ethnic Societies and Willingness to Defend One’s Own Country: Russian Speakers in the Baltic States,” *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 19, no. 1 (2021).